The 2¢ Columbian Issue, Scott 231

The report of the Third Assistant Postmaster General, of November 20, 1892, includes this statement: "The principal feature of the Columbian stamps, with two exceptions, is the delineation of some scene in the life of Columbus associated with the discovery of America." While this is certainly true, nothing is said about the accuracy of the scenes.

As an example, the design of the 2¢ stamp (above) was a source of amusement for collectors and critics of this issue at the time it first appeared. The legend on the 2¢ stamp reads "Landing Of Columbus" and it depicts Columbus with a beard, whereas on the 1¢ stamp—which is supposed to reproduce a scene which took place one day earlier (right)—he is clean shaven!

The Landing of Columbus

In *Mekeel's Weekly* of February 23, 1893 ("Study of the New Stamps") A. S. Hitchcock provided this historical background on the event the stamp depicts:

The landing was made early on the morning of October 12th. It is doubtful if much time was taken for a morning meal, such must have been their excitement. The ceremony of taking possession of the new-found country in the name of the Castilian sovereigns is taking place under unique circumstances. In the foreground stands Columbus with drawn sword in one hand and the royal standard in the other. Somewhat in the background are seen the two Pinzon brothers, captains of the two smaller vessels of the fleet, holding aloft their banners. Among the others may be seen a priest with uplifted cross….

The scene is entitled the Landing of Columbus. Where did he land? The records say San Salvador, as the Island was named by Columbus…This island has not been certainly identified, although it was one of the Bahamas. Arguments have been advanced in favor of five different islands [in the Bahamas]….

The only document in existence…by which the island can be located, is one by the historian Las Casas, a contemporary of Columbus…It is an abridged copy of the log-book…kept by Columbus on his first voyage:

"At dawn I ordered the boat of the ship and the boats of the caravels to be got ready, and went along the island in a north-northeasternly direction, to see the other side, which was on the other side of the east. I was afraid of a reef of rocks which entirely surrounds the island, although there is within it depth enough and ample harbor for all the vessels of Christendom, but the entrance is very narrow…This island is very large and very level and has very green trees, and an abundance of water, and a very large lagoon in the middle, without any mountain…."

[Columbus then writes] "I determined to wait until tomorrow evening and then to sail for the southwest. I returned to the ship and set sail, and saw so many islands that I could not decide to which one I should go first…I looked for the largest one, and determined to make for it, and I am so doing, and it is probably distant five leagues from this of San Salvador."

The scene on the 2¢ Columbian stamp is from a painting by John Vanderlyn, which was painted in 1839 and hangs in the rotunda of the Capitol in Washington, D.C.

It is the same scene that also is depicted on the 15¢ Pictorials of 1869 (Scott 118-119, 129, photo Sc. 129).

The lettering and the numbering are the same as on the 1¢ stamp. The stamp designer and engravers also were the same for both stamps: Designer Alfred Sarony Major, Engravers Alfred Jones and Charles Skinner for the picture, and Douglas Ronaldson for the frame, lettering and numerals.

Most of the 2¢ stamps were printed from plates containing 200 subjects each; however, some 2¢ stamps were printed in sheets of 100 because ABNC did not have enough large presses to keep up with the need for this value. A total of 90 plates of 200 and 45 plates of 100 were used to print the 2¢ Columbians. The 200 subject sheets were cut along a horizontal guideline into panes of 100 stamps each. The 100 subject sheets were split along vertical perforations into panes of 50 subjects each. Some 100 subject full sheets were sold intact at the Philatelic Agency in Washington, D.C., and can be found today.

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